

**INTERNATIONAL JAPANESE STUDENTS:
THEIR EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING NEEDS
AT AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES**

By

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that it was written by me. Any help that I have received in my research and the preparation of this thesis itself has been acknowledged.

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.....

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ABSTRACT

International Japanese Students: Their Expectations and Learning Needs at Australian Universities

International full fee paying students make a sizable economic contribution to the Australian economy and the universities at which they enroll. Considerable competition for these students from the UK and USA indicates the necessity of meeting their needs if the Australian higher education market is to be preserved. Recent research has challenged the effectiveness of the currently operating Australian marketisation model that focuses upon attracting students and maximizing profits. International students, and specifically Japanese students who were the focus of this research, are attracted to Australian university studies for a number of reasons which are analyzed. The numbers of Japanese students studying at Australian universities have fallen since 2006, despite Japan being potentially one of the largest international markets.

The learning needs and expectations of 51 Japanese undergraduate and postgraduate students at two Sydney universities were analyzed using a questionnaire and semi-structured interview during their first semester of enrollment. The expectations and needs of these students had been shaped by growing up and being educated in Japan, a culture that values university education in different ways to Australia, and has different views on learning and study. Analyses of Australian academic culture, that emphasizes individuality and critical thinking, together with analyses of Japanese values and cultural mores, provided the foundations to guide the study and help formulate the questions used to gather data.

Results revealed a considerable proportion of respondents were postgraduates contrary to the expectation that the market is chiefly an undergraduate one. It was found that only approximately thirty per cent of students had come to Australia for primarily educational reasons. The other seventy per cent had been attracted to Australia the country and its culture, and had been motivated for personal development reasons and to satisfy challenges pertaining, in some cases, to English language acquisition. These findings reflect earlier research based on ESL classes. The majority appear to have been motivated by liberal education reasons, with explanation of the process engaged in, with so little serious preparation, perhaps best accounted for in terms of Hart's (1999) work on the hero's personal journey with its substantial challenges.

Results indicated that a considerable number of students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels experienced difficulties with a number of basic academic skills expected at Australian universities. These included listening to and understanding lectures, note taking in lectures, reading for assignments, writing assignments, discussing studies with Australian students, and group work activities generally that required public presentation and argument. The majority had done little reading or other preparation for their educational adventure in a foreign Australian culture, although many were aware of the fact that their undertaking would be hard, having spoken to other Japanese students. Relatively few appeared to have been influenced by family members who had undertaken international study. All had been admitted on the basis of IELTS or TOEFL standards set by the universities, but had studied English in preparation for their international studies for relatively short periods of time, with this apparently contributing to their problems with Australian academic skills. Findings indicate that most of these students continued to frame their intercultural experience in terms of the Japanese cultural scenario, leading in many cases to academic and socio-cultural expectations at odds with Australian university expectations of the roles these students should play.

Specific recommendations are made regarding the need for university policies to ensure that Japanese students are made aware of academic and socio-cultural differences and challenges before enrollment, and are offered programs that will develop specific academic skills. The analyses of the culturally-based academic learning difficulties encountered by students in this research should provide a substantial guide for specific skill development programs. Some of the expectations, that would be appropriate in the Japanese cultural setting, cannot be accommodated in the Australian one, and need to be managed prior to enrollment.

On the wider policy level, there is also a serious need to reconsider the standards of English required for admission. Recommendations are made for a larger scale, longitudinal study to be undertaken to address issues that could not be considered in what was essentially an exploratory study. The analyses of Japanese cultural values and social expectations, presented as part of this research, would appear to offer a substantial basis to assist institutions and staff to better understand Japanese students and their learning needs in the Australian academic cultural context, and to guide both research and teaching.

In policy terms, results indicate that there is a clear need to reconsider the marketisation model and spend more on support services for the students who have paid full fees. Results also indicate that the policies advanced by government policy makers linking tourism and university study are

relatively naïve, and cannot succeed without better understanding of the needs and expectations of international students from different cultural backgrounds, and better support services carefully tailored to their needs.